

Overwatering occurs because most homeowners think a lush green lawn needs a lot of water - a common misconception.

If properly maintained the deep extensive root systems of tall fescue, bermudagrass, and zoysiagrass make them extremely drought tolerant lawn grasses. When water becomes limited, grass cannot effectively cool itself and becomes susceptible to wilting.

The standard recommendation for irrigating a lawn is 1 inch of water per week, during the growing season.

Therefore, a one-acre lawn requires 27,154 gallons of water, so it is especially important to apply every drop wisely.

Environmental factors like intense sunlight, high temperatures, low humidity, and windy conditions promote water loss. Excessive water loss may induce stress symptoms like leaf rolling or a noticeable blue-gray color change.



## How can you make your lawn more drought tolerant?

- ☐ Apply the correct amount of water when it is needed. Properly applied irrigation should wet the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. This encourages a deeper root system and it saves you money on your water bill.
- ☐ Mow your lawn to the correct height. Set your mower for the highest setting recommended for your turf. For example, bermuda and zoysia grasses have a maximum mowing height of  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 inch. Tall fescue has a maximum mowing height of 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 inches.
- ☐ Remember to never cut off more than  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the leaf blade at one time. This minimizes unnecessary stress to the turf.
- ☐ Always use sharp mower blades. Cleanly cut leaf blades heal faster than torn ones, and use less water.
- ☐ Limit nitrogen fertilizer applications. Excess nitrogen weakens the turf and increases the amount of water needed for survival.
- ☐ Before establishing or renovating your lawn, evaluate the site and your needs to select the most suitable turfgrass species for your situation. By selecting the proper grass, less maintenance and water will be required. The brochure *Carolina Lawns*, available from the NC Cooperative Extension Service, can aid you in this process.



## The healthiest lawns are irrigated deeply and infrequently.

This management approach to established turfgrasses is recommended throughout the year, regardless of water restrictions, and is the best technique for maintaining a healthy lawn. In the summer it also reduces the occurrence of diseases like brown patch.

## Is your irrigation system watering efficiently?

Adjust your irrigation system to provide enough water to moisten the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. You can do this by following the steps below.

- 1) Choose a calm day with little wind. Place five or six open topped cans at known distances from the sprinkler (shallow cans like tuna or cat food work best)
- 2) Turn the sprinkler on for a known time period (30 minutes is a good starting point.)
- 3) Measure and record the depth of water in each can.
- 4) Calculate the average depth of water in all cans by adding the depths and dividing by the number of cans.
- 5) Use a garden spade or soil probe to determine how deep the soil was wet. The instrument will push easily into wet soil and will become more difficult to push as you approach a drier zone.
- 6) Based on this information, you can determine how long you should water your lawn once a week to wet the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. For example, if your average from step #4 is  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch and it wet the soil 3 inches in 30 minutes, you should run the sprinkler for a total of one hour.



## **Runoff, the water that runs from your lawn into the storm drain,**

is a serious waste of water. It normally occurs when water is applied faster than the soil can absorb it. You can take several precautions to minimize and prevent runoff.

- 1) Know your soil type. Clays and compacted soils will be more prone to runoff than sandy or well aggregated soils, and need to be watered more gradually.
- 2) Monitor your irrigation and watch for unnecessary runoff.
- 3) If runoff occurs, adjust your irrigation controller for less time.
- 4) Alternate irrigation with drying periods until the soil has been wet to a depth of 4 to 6 inches.
- 5) Take into account what the recent weather has been. If it has rained recently, adjust your irrigation cycle accordingly.

## **Another option...**

Last, you always have the option of allowing the lawn to go dormant during the hot summer months. Irrigating or watering of the lawn is done only if a drought lasts longer than 3 weeks. Grass will not be emerald green, but it is alive, just waiting for better conditions.

## **Remember...**

- ◆ Always use sharp lawn mower blades.
- ◆ Mow at the appropriate height for the species maintained.
- ◆ Never remove more than one-third of the leaf blade at one time.
- ◆ Avoid unnecessary nitrogen applications.
- ◆ Use common sense and watch for signs from the turf to tell you when it needs water!

For more information, contact:

**City of Greensboro  
WaterWise Hotline,  
373-7610**

or

**NC Cooperative Extension,  
Guilford County Center,  
375-5876.**



# **WaterWise Lawn Care**

